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**THE HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS OF PENNSYLVANIA ARCHEOLOGY**

**JOHN WITTHOFT**

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# PROCEEDINGS of the American Philosophical Society

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AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY  
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE  
PHILADELPHIA 6, PA.

## THE HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS OF PENNSYLVANIA ARCHEOLOGY\*

JOHN WITTHOFT

Pennsylvania State Anthropologist

INTEREST in our Indians and in the relics of earlier cultures began with the earliest settlement of the Atlantic seaboard, but only recently have any techniques for the study of prehistory been recognized in this area. Throughout the eastern United States one particular type of archeological interpretation has held sway from Colonial times until the present, as the usual folk interpretation and as the older scholar's procedure. According to this view, the most conspicuous archeological site in an area was identified as the location of a historic Indian town, and other sites as camps and trailside bivouacs of the same community. By this line of reasoning, all artifact types found on the soil of a county were ascribed to one people and culture, and problems of chronology and culture change were dismissed as irrelevant. Such was the scholar's approach to any portion of the East in 1880, and such is the layman's interpretation in most sectors today. At the present time, students of the prehistory of New York State have advanced furthest from this anti-historical point of view, while our knowledge of Pennsylvania, like that of Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey, is in the pioneering stage and has only in the past decade begun to produce meaningful hypotheses.

The revolution from the antiquarian's collecting of Indian relics to the student's unraveling of prehistory in the East took place in New York State about 1880. William Beauchamp, an amateur historian and collector of Indian relics, apparently was the first to notice that certain very conspicuous sites in the area of historic Cayuga occupation were characterized by a relatively few types of artifacts. The triangular arrowpoints and distinctive pottery of these sites were sometimes associated with brass and iron artifacts and other objects of European manufacture. Beauchamp concluded that sites of this type represented the Cayuga occupation of the area, and that sites of other types should be ascribed to earlier cultures. At about the same

time, and apparently independent of Beauchamp's work, Percy Van Epps identified historic Mohawk sites and drew similar conclusions.

Both Beauchamp and Van Epps drew up the first tentative cultural inventories for local cultures of the early historic and late prehistoric periods, and thus made it possible for later students to set up historical sequences of earlier culture types. They both studied historical sources and assigned names and dates to sites from data in the Jesuit and Colonial records. This constituted almost the first site documentation in the East, and, although these historical identifications of town sites are still widely accepted, they are extremely uncertain and rest on rather slight evidence. These pioneer students had discovered historical cultures, but, as is usually the case, their specific site identifications are unsatisfactory; their contribution was to archeology rather than to history. Beauchamp extended his studies to the Seneca and Onondaga areas, and set up a definition of Iroquoian culture which he generalized from the specific cultures. Later students concentrated on the earlier periods in New York prehistory which Beauchamp had revealed, with little attention to the later Iroquoian periods. Thus our knowledge of the late periods in New York has been little refined since Beauchamp's time, despite large scale, uncontrolled digging for relics on historic and prehistoric Iroquois sites.

Beauchamp and his student, Arthur Parker, popularized a definition of Iroquois culture which is well known to every collector and to many laymen. This set of conclusions has served, not as impetus to further knowledge of Iroquoian culture, but, instead, as a solution to all problems and has, to some extent, obscured studies of northeastern prehistory. The most conspicuous diagnostics in this definition of Iroquois would have fitted historic Creek, Cherokee, Delaware, or Pawnee as well, and in fact represented the "index fossils" of a time period rather than a culture or tribe. However, broader pictures did not emerge until a very recent time. With our present knowledge of late cultures in areas outside of New York, many

\* Research was carried out with the aid of a grant from the Phillips Library Fund of the American Philosophical Society.



## *Circular Relating to a Proposed Archæological Map.*



DEAR SIR :

The Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia has undertaken the preparation of an Archæological Map to embrace the valleys of the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers, and desires your co-operation in this important work.

The Map is intended to show the location of all the principal remains attributed to the Indian tribes who formerly occupied these regions. It will include contiguous portions of the States of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.

Societies and individuals are earnestly requested to furnish whatever *information* they may possess concerning the following classes of antiquities :

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Gravel deposits (Palæolithic) | 8. Workshops.   |
| 2. Artificial shell-heaps.       | 9. Surface deposits of implements, or <i>caches</i> . |
| 3. Cave-retreats.                | 10. Large rocks in place, used as mortars.            |
| 4. Encampments or village sites. | 11. Rock inscriptions ( <i>in situ</i> ).             |
| 5. Earth-works.                  | 12. Burial places.                                    |
| 6. Old-fields.                   | 13. Tumuli or mounds.                                 |
| 7. Quarries.                     | 14. Indian trails.                                    |

*A full description and accurate location* of any of the above should be given. How far and in what direction from nearest town? On or near what stream, if any? On whose property? The occurrence of native objects of *copper*, or articles of European introduction, should be mentioned.

Names and addresses of persons who possess collections of relics, or who are interested in archæology or local history, also the titles of local Scientific Societies, with the addresses of their respective secretaries, will be thankfully received.

Respectfully, yours,

EDWIN A. BARBER,  
JOHN R. BAKER,  
HENRY PHILLIPS, JR.,

FRANCIS JORDAN, JR.,  
STEWART CULIN,  
DANIEL G. BRINTON, M. D., *ex officio*.  
*Committee.*

Communications may be addressed to Henry Phillips, Jr., Secretary, Philadelphia.

Second Edition—1000.

FIG. 1. Printed broadsheet questionnaire distributed in the first archeological survey in the Delaware and Susquehanna valley about 1890.

cal studies, and, after 1920, the Curator was responsible for general collections, and the Antiquarian took charge of antiques and Indian relics. Although the Museum participated in the Susquehanna River Expedition of 1916, it did not undertake archeological research. The Historical Commission concerned itself with archeological problems following 1926, but not primarily with collections. In 1931 Donald A. Cadzow was appointed State Anthropologist, thus giving archeological research an official, permanent status in Pennsylvania for the first time.

The Commission's duties were originally defined to include responsibility for archeological studies within the state, while collections were to be turned over to the State Museum. Thus the State Anthropologist and his staff were in one administrative unit, while the collections were in another, and this dichotomy presented many difficulties. The largest backlog of Pennsylvania material available was buried in the Museum without enough staff to process it and make it accessible, and the two divisions involved duplication and waste of funds. Since these two functions have now been consolidated, and since housecleaning and processing collections have proceeded far enough to promise the future availability of data and the construction of a program, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is now finally in a position to attempt long-range projects in Pennsylvania archeology. We also hope and trust that there is present the stability necessary to carry on research properly, so that tasks undertaken can be carried through to completion and publication and so that a staff can be kept in enough security and freedom from outside domination to do adequate and constructive work.

The Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh is also returning to a field of earlier interest and is becoming increasingly active in the archeology of western Pennsylvania. It is hoped that, in years to come, Carnegie may undertake intensive work in the Ohio drainage area, thus taking as its field one distinct major natural and cultural area in Pennsylvania, while the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission may continue and intensify its present work in the area of the Delaware and Susquehanna drainages. I feel that this pattern of revived interest in areas and problems near home is a very healthy symptom in the present development of research institutions. It recognizes the universal applicability of a science, and the equal value of data and conclusions drawn

from nearby fields, while minimizing somewhat the romantic attraction of the far way and exotic.

The American Philosophical Society has recently intensified its interest in the anthropology of the Northeast, and has in particular in the past decade supported primary research on linguistic and ethnological problems in the area. Present cooperation of the American Philosophical Society with the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and other Pennsylvania institutions has been especially productive in the fields of ethnology and ethnohistory. While supporting archeological research in adjacent areas, the society has also contributed to the support of research and excavation in Pennsylvania, and has been a valuable ally in many other ways to those working in the field.

In one recent instance, the American Philosophical Society has provided haven for a series of manuscripts, notes and reports, and photographic negatives on Pennsylvania archeology, which originated in the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's files but which have passed out of custody during the past ten years, and were in serious danger of loss. Also included in the lot are copies of reports from other sources and a few notes from local collectors. Many of these reports are records of Works Progress Administration Archeological Projects in Pennsylvania, but more than half represent activities of the State Commission rather than WPA reports. The bulk of the material is not publishable in its present form, but can be put into final shape by students in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the addition of data available in the Commission's files and collections. This manuscript represents major source material, and all interested in Pennsylvania archeology should be very thankful for its safe custody in the American Philosophical Society Archives, where it can be protected both from destruction and premature publication.

The recent emphasis of the Society's interest in the anthropology of the northeastern area makes available to students in the area certain facilities not readily available elsewhere. Particularly important is the role of the Society as an archive for anthropological manuscript. Here the student can deposit almost any type of report or set of field notes, whether unique or a copy, and be certain that they may be secure, properly processed, and available to other scholars, while yet under any necessary restrictions. A unique manuscript is data in danger of loss and destruction, and thus I



should like to recommend my own policy of placing duplicate copies of catalogs, notes, drawings, and photographs with the American Philosophical Society, as a sort of fire insurance, if for no other reason. Particularly I should like to see the notes and data of non-professionals and smaller institutions safeguarded in this way.

Archeology has come to be, as have other sciences, a vast cooperative adventure in which progress is the result of the work of a community of professionals and amateurs, rather than the product of any individual. The sketch of our present knowledge of Pennsylvania archeology which follows is drawn from many sources and many individuals have contributed to it; it seems scant enough, but we hope it is the beginning of a large scale picture which will be developed by the effects of several institutions and innumerable individuals.

At the present time eastern Pennsylvania is better known than the western part of the state, and the latest periods are generally better known than earlier epochs. The historic cultures of the Susquehanna are better known than any other segment in the archeology of the state. Although definitive analyses of Susquehannock culture are not yet published, past and current work in Lancaster county offers a good picture of the Conestoga period, in which native material culture was decadent, and of the preceding Schultz Site period, which represents the apex in Susquehannock population and power during the 1620-1660 period. Sites which could be ancestral to Susquehannock of this period are found, not on the lower Susquehanna, but in the upper river, from Sunbury to Elmira. Here Andaste-Susquehannock sites of the earliest historic period are preceded by closely related prehistoric sites, and these by earlier Iroquoian horizons, which follow after an Owasco sequence.

We do not fully understand the political-military factors of the early seventeenth century which pushed the Susquehannock down the Susquehanna into a new territory, but there seems little doubt that this is one effect of the formation and arming of the Iroquois confederacy. A major problem of this area is the relationship between Iroquois and Owasco, for several horizons of each are apparently only stages in a local evolutionary sequence. This is one of three areas in Pennsylvania in which the classical "Iroquois problem" is of major importance; "Where did the Iroquois come from, and when did they enter the Northeast?" Field work in Bradford County in 1948 was orientated

about this problem, and this portion of Pennsylvania is one area in which current theories about the Iroquois problem can be tested.

Susquehannock entry into the lower Susquehanna apparently wiped out a number of communities of peoples indigenous in that area, and for which we have nothing but archeological data. This Shenk's Ferry culture appears as a conspicuous late prehistoric complex from the Juniata to the Maryland border, and a distinctive phase of it is associated with a few European objects and Susquehannock sherds. We have no hint as to the linguistic and political relationships of the people, who apparently disappeared before any Europeans had penetrated into this territory. The Shenk's Ferry culture is not related to those in immediately adjacent areas, and its apparent relationships which are vague, are to the Fuert Focus of Ohio, the Gala Site in West Virginia, and Tutelo of Virginia. However, we need more information before we can speculate on the origins and history of this culture, which represents an "island" in the Northeast.

Owasco and Shenk's Ferry appear to follow the Clempson's Island complex, which I think is the earliest Owasco period in the Susquehanna. The relationships of this complex to Owasco and to the earlier history of the valley are primary problems about which we know very little. Earlier horizons in the Susquehanna are postulated but known only through surface collections. Thus our demonstrable picture of this area extends back in time only to A.D. 1000 or later, and the great bulk of the Indian history of the valley belongs in earlier and scarcely known periods.

In the Delaware Valley several horizons are recognized for both Munsee and Delaware in late prehistoric times although the historic sites are not known with certainty. Munsee is known last as one focus of the Iroquois Aspect, and Owasco stages, which are considered ancestral, precede it. This evolutionary sequence needs further study and interpretation, with particular emphasis on correlations and cross-ties with the Susquehanna, Hudson, and Mohawk drainage sequences. Several stages are also known in the Delaware sequence further south, and these show little relationship to the Munsee material. The Delaware picture is drawn from scant data, and needs extensive field work, orientated toward tracing Delaware back to their earliest recognizable stage in the Delaware Valley, and then attempting the difficult problem of Delaware origins. Again in

the Delaware drainage area in Pennsylvania, earlier cultures are only postulated and present information, carried back in time from the historic period, is but a tiny scrap of the whole fragment. New Jersey's work on the Delaware Valley provides us with considerable data from earlier sites, but the picture is far from finished. Present knowledge of late horizons should be extended back in time, and the temporal relationships between earlier excavated sites are still to be worked out.

One important feature of late period sites in Pennsylvania, as well as adjacent sections, is the occurrence of trade sherds in many sites. These occasional stray fragments of pottery, when found in context, permit cross-ties between different cultures and areas and make it possible to demonstrate contemporaneity between different sites and different cultures. Delaware artifacts have not yet been found in definite associations with European materials in Pennsylvania but they are found with Susquehannock sherds of a type known only from historic sites on the Susquehanna. Recognition and proper interpretation of such ceramic material will integrate studies throughout the Northeast and make possible sweeping areal interpretations.

Historic components are so far unknown in western Pennsylvania, with the exception of the extreme Northwest. Late cultures of this area have not been identified with any historic, political

or linguistic groups, and the reasons for disappearance of these cultures are unknown. Described sites obviously contain several components which have not been separated, and relative chronology within the late western Pennsylvania cultures is not even suggested. Here Early and Middle Woodland horizons are better understood. This whole region contrasts with the eastern part of the state so far as culture elements are known, and belongs, both physiographically and culturally, with the Ohio region. It is still hoped that cross-ties may be found between this section and the Susquehanna, but trade sherds between these regions have not yet been found.

Thus our present picture of Pennsylvania archeology shows two different aspects; one is the direct historical picture, working back from the historically known into the prehistoric. Where this procedure has been started in the eastern part of the state, only a tiny segment of the total history is known. From another point of view all of the known material is organized into a partly intuitive, partly demonstrated scheme covering the total surmised occupation, and this is tested, bit by bit, in the field, without trying to carry a continuous sequence back from the historic present. Present and future work in Pennsylvania should use both techniques to their utmost, as complementary approaches to a set of problems which looked very simple ten years ago, but which now seem of unbelievable complexity.



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